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SOCIAL AND BIOLOGICAL STRUGGLES ¹

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I

It has long been perceived that the "struggle for existence" is common to the human race and to the animal kingdom in general. Biologists are also aware that it extends to the vegetable kingdom and to all life. The sociologists, very few of whom are biologists in any proper sense, but most of whom have read the great leading works in biology, have themselves long been endeavoring to find the bond connecting the social with the biological struggle and the essential characters by which the two forms of struggle are distinguished. It is not too much to say, and is what might be expected, that the greater part of all that the sociologists say on the subject is wide of the mark, and exhibits an almost complete failure on their part to understand the true nature of the biological struggle.

The socialists, for the most part, regard the social struggle as a practical extension of the biological struggle into the human field, and the work of Karl Marx is frequently characterized as having the same relation to society that Darwin's work has to the organic world. For a long time the modern doctrines relating to life were regarded as highly favorable to socialism, and they are

¹ From the *Annales de l'Institut International de Sociologie*, Tome XI, pp. 111-126, Paris, 1907.

still so regarded by many. Nevertheless it is a fact that they are looked upon by most biologists who think at all on the subject, and by biological philosophers in general, as completely opposed to socialism, and as sustaining the old "let-alone" political economy.

The sociologists in the main deem it their duty to deny that there is any necessary connection between social and biological struggles. They are especially severe on all attempts to show that there is any redeeming virtue in social struggles, or that it is through them that social evolution has taken place, in any such sense as it is claimed that organic evolution takes place, viz., through the struggle for existence and the survival of the fittest. Considerable ingenuity has been shown in pointing out that the cases are not parallel, and that social struggles result in the survival of the unfit.

The sociologists generally confound the so-called "struggle for existence" with Darwinism, and very few of them have any adequate idea of what Darwin's phrase "natural selection" means. It is true that Darwin used both phrases, and also that he recognized the influence of direct effort, i. e., use and disuse, in modifying structures, although the discovery of that great law is more properly attributable to Lamarck, and constitutes the essence of Lamarckism as distinguished from Darwinism. But the sociologists are unable to see the distinction, and have only a confused idea of the whole process which they imagine to constitute Darwinism.

With this vague notion in their minds certain of them have invented the phrase "social Darwinism," and have set it up as a sort of "man of straw" in order to show their agility in knocking it down. There is of course much difference in the ability with which different authors have treated the subject, and a few have evinced some conception of the true merits of the question.

II

Darwinism has very generally been confounded with Malthusianism, and the fact that Darwin modestly admitted that he was led to the consideration of such subjects by reading Mal-

thus on *The Principle of Population* has caused most of the sociological writers who graduated out of political economy into sociology, to identify the Malthusian law with Darwinism as a whole, and to imagine that when they have stated the former, which, as economists, they usually understand, they have stated Darwin's great biological principle, which they do not at all understand.

Darwin did not say nor mean to imply that the Malthusian principle embraced the whole of the biologic law. It is contained in the latter with certain qualifications, and naturally suggested the wider applications that Darwin made of it to the organic world; but it falls far short of embodying even the principle of natural selection.

M. Achille Loria, in a very interesting chapter entitled "Social Darwinism,"² confines himself to a statement of the principle that "the quantity of subsistence existing on the earth is not sufficient for the nourishment of all organized beings, so that they are compelled to secure it at the price of an incessant struggle," and he bases his discussion entirely on that principle, saying:

It is natural that the weak should be defeated in this struggle, because, not being able to obtain any nourishment, or at least not a sufficient quantity, they perish, while the strong survive and triumph, so that the species possessing the "fittest" qualities improve little by little and rise to more perfect conditions of existence.

M. Loria then shows that certain sociologists apply this theory to social phenomena:

Mèn, too, they say, have carried on for centuries a terrible struggle for life, which, in our days, manifests itself in the unbridled competition of which we are witnesses; in this fierce struggle the victory is to the strong, and this constitutes the basis of evolution and progress. It is therefore wrong to deplore the bloody battles between men and the fierce competition which makes them trample upon one another in order to be first, since it is this competition which insures the triumph of the best, the most worthy; it is wrong to try to make laws to mitigate this struggle, since it is a valuable factor in progressive development. . . . Hence the most complete quietism, the happy calm of the philosopher and the *dolce far niente* of the legislator

² *Problèmes sociaux contemporains*, Paris, 1897, Sixième Leçon; *Le Darwinisme social*, pp. 113-35.

constitute the lesson taught by the Darwinian theory, according to these modern theorists.³

Such is the theory which, according to M. Loria, is called social Darwinism, but in his view these social applications of Darwinism are wholly false. He does not say who has defended this doctrine, but it cannot be denied that something near akin to it is held by many biologists who attempt to carry biological principles into human affairs, and that it is practically the attitude of most scientific men and evolutionists in so far as they have expressed themselves on the subject. It is the doctrine that I have characterized as the "gospel of inaction," and to the refutation of which I have devoted much effort.

M. Loria easily shows that there is no such parallel, and his comparison of the industrially successful class in society to parasites is ingenious and not wholly incorrect. He could have made his argument much stronger if he had recognized that all predatory animals are essentially parasites, since they live on the nourishment stored up by animals that take it from the vegetable kingdom, and do not differ in this essential respect from parasites that attach themselves to the bodies of other animals.

But the "struggle," if it can be so designated, between parasites and their hosts, including that between carnivorous and herbivorous animals, is only a very small part of Darwinism. In fact it may be said to form no part of it, since it was well understood long before Darwin was born. And yet, curiously enough, the so-called "social Darwinism" scarcely ever gets farther than this. I have never seen any distinctively Darwinian principle appealed to in the discussions of "social Darwinism." It is therefore wholly inappropriate to characterize as social Darwinism the *laissez-faire* doctrine of political economists, even when it is attempted to support that doctrine by appeals to the laws of organic development. That the *laissez-faire* doctrine is false and not sustained by biological principles I freely admit and have abundantly shown, but the fallacy involved is to be found in an entirely different department of scientific investigation.

³ *Op. cit.*, pp. 117, 118.

III

There is another school of sociologists who, ignoring the economic struggle, confine themselves to the race struggle. These have still another form of supposed "social Darwinism" which they have conjured up in their own imagination, and against which they are battling as valiantly as Don Quixote battled with the windmills. With them social Darwinism is any attempt to maintain that human or social evolution has been influenced or furthered by the struggle of races, peoples, and nations. Their idea is that the only condition to progress is absolute peace, and that all disturbances of the peace of the world are retrogressive and even "pathological."

It is not my present intention to refute this doctrine. That has been done far more eloquently by history than it can ever be done by words, but I wish to protest in the strongest possible terms against the application of the term Darwinism to the race struggle. I know of no ethnologist, historian, or sociologist among those who see the real effect of the struggle of races, who has accepted this designation for that law. The general character of that struggle has always been known, and therefore it no more belongs to Darwin's teachings than does the law of parasitism. But the great discovery of precisely how the race struggle operates in the process of civilization, though clearly formulated by Gumpłowicz in 1875 in a pamphlet⁴ of whose existence Darwin could have known nothing, was not fully worked out until 1883,⁵ one year after Darwin's death. That principle is to be ranked with the principle of natural selection, and may be appropriately called its sociological homologue, because, although an entirely different principle, it agrees with the latter in constituting a strictly scientific explanation of a great natural process, never before understood. I call it the principle of *social synergy*. It certainly is not social Darwinism nor Darwinism in any form. It would be difficult to find even an adumbration of it in any of Darwin's works, or, for that matter,

⁴Ludwig Gumpłowicz, *Race und Staat. Eine Untersuchung über das Gesetz der Staatenbildung*, Wien, 1875.

⁵Ludwig Gumpłowicz, *Der Rassenkampf. Sociologische Untersuchungen*. Innsbruck, 1883.

in the works of any author prior to 1875 or even to 1883. But Ratzenhofer in 1893,⁶ and especially in 1898,⁷ took it up and greatly expanded it. But he acknowledges that it was Gumpowicz who succeeded in first establishing sociology as the science which forms the foundation of all political teachings.⁸

IV

One of the sociologists of the school now under consideration has recently made a general onslaught upon the new doctrine, but instead of going to original sources and analyzing the works which I have enumerated in which it was first promulgated and most elaborately expounded, he has seen fit to attack a work in which it is simply set forth by the author, though with all due credit to the discoverer and chief expounder, and without claiming any originality in the matter at all. He seems to be wholly ignorant of the works named and of their authors, except as he has met with them in the book which forms the object of his polemic. He does, indeed, mention Gumpowicz, and calls him a Pole, although he has been a professor in the University of Graz nearly all his life. He also mentions Ratzenhofer, whom he calls a German, apparently for no other reason than that his works have been mostly published in Leipzig. As a matter of fact this new and vital doctrine, like the new doctrine of value in economics, is essentially Austrian, and the discovery of both these principles is probably due to the prolonged reflection of penetrating minds upon the series of social struggles which that land of many races has had to pass through.

But the author to whom I have referred has seen fit to direct

⁶ Gustav Ratzenhofer, *Wesen und Zweck der Politik als Theil der Sociologie und Grundlage der Staatswissenschaft*, 3 vols. Leipzig, 1893.

⁷ Gustav Ratzenhofer, *Die sociologische Erkenntnis: Positive Philosophie des socialen Lebens*, Leipzig, 1898.

⁸ These are his own words, to which almost all his expounders neglect to call attention: "Nach vielen mehr oder weniger erfolgreichen Versuchen, das gesellschaftliche Leben wissenschaftlich zu erfassen, in welcher Hinsicht insbesondere Comte, Spencer, Tylor und Bastian bahnbrechend wirkten, scheint es Gumpowicz gelungen, die Sociologie als Wissenschaft festzustellen, welche die Grundlage der Lehre über die Politik bildet."—*Wesen und Zweck der Politik*, Vol. I, Preface, p. v.

his shafts at an American who is guilty only of having perceived that this principle lies at the foundation of sociology, as Ratzenhofer admits. This author characterizes the doctrine as social Darwinism, although none of the works treating it contain that or any similar expression. He is a peace reformer and any admission that there has ever been any social virtue in war is highly offensive to him.

We are interested now only in pointing out how completely this author misunderstands the teachings of Darwin whose name he so freely invokes. He sees in Darwinism nothing but war—*bellum omnium contra omnes*. Nevertheless, ten years earlier he had said:

Just as the perfect being wins in individual struggles, so the most perfect nation wins in international struggles. Darwin's law acts as inexorably in the case of collectivities as in that of individuals. The resultant of international struggles is also the triumph of the best.

But his mind seems to have undergone a great change since that date, and he now sees no good in social struggles, but only evil.

All his examples from biology refer to the relations subsisting between predatory animals and their prey, which he looks upon as a war of extermination; whereas, as Darwin clearly saw, a predatory animal cannot exterminate its prey without at the same time exterminating itself. In fact, between a predatory animal and its prey there is no struggle at all. A struggle implies some sort of reciprocity between the parties to it. But between a wolf and a sheep there is no mutuality. All the "struggling" the sheep can do is to escape from the jaws of the wolf. Even the most robust ram in such a case would have no instinct except that of flight.

This author makes the same mistake as Professor Loria in saying that the great difference between animal and human struggles is that the former are always between different species while the latter are between individuals of the same species. This is regarded as the final and conclusive argument. It simply shows how completely these authors fail to understand the most rudimentary principles of the biological struggle for existence. Dar-

win himself lays down the law that the struggle is always most intense between organisms that are most similar. The reason is obvious. It is essentially a struggle for subsistence. Any environment contains certain elements which a given organism can appropriate. Similar organisms appropriate similar elements. When too many organisms of the same general kind exist on a given area, all using the same forms of subsistence, it is evident that they will exhaust their resources, and there will be a struggle among them for the supply of their wants. This is a universal law in biology and applies to plants as well as to animals. To all outward appearances there is perfect peace. Any landscape in a state of nature presents an aspect of complete tranquillity, but the biologist knows that this is an illusion, and that there is going on an intense competition among all living things for the means of subsistence. If a given area is watched for a sufficient length of time changes will be perceived. Certain forms will be found to have gained the ascendant and advanced in number and vigor, while certain other forms have lost ground and begun to decline. The former will ultimately come to dominate the field, and the latter will disappear, having succumbed in the struggle for existence. The observing botanist will note the existence of varieties among plants. The leaves of some will be of a deeper or a paler hue, some will develop hairs, down, tomentum, bloom, etc. All these differences in outward appearance are due to corresponding differences in the minute structure and constitution of the plants, and these differences of structure in turn enable the plant to appropriate slightly different elements from the soil, air, sunlight, etc., and thus to escape in so far from the struggle for subsistence. It is thus that varieties arise. The differentiation at length becomes specific, and we have an explanation of the "origin of species." The great principle according to which all this goes on is natural selection, and it requires generations to effect the changes. Our anti-social Darwinists seem to have no conception of this law, and never get beyond the crude idea of bloody battles in which the weak are "devoured" by the strong.

It is true that closely allied species do compete with each

other and one species often drives out another, but this is where both species require nearly the same food. Thus the brown rats in America have practically exterminated the black rats, which were formerly abundant. The latter seem to have been introduced earlier and flourished in our houses and barns until the brown or gray rats came. These required exactly the same kind of food, and being superior in certain qualities, they were able to multiply until they consumed all the food there was for rats, and the black rats, being unable to obtain any food, perished. The same occurs in a pure state of nature and on a large scale, but the great competition is always among individuals of the same species, resulting, as already described, in the gradual production of slightly different varieties and ultimately of distinct species, and thus causing all the variety and multiplicity that nature presents, and accounting for its power to appropriate all the elements of subsistence that the earth affords.

This competition is universal. It occurs among the most innocent and peaceful creatures, and even, as already remarked, among plants. But it also occurs among predatory animals, not as between them and their peaceful prey, but among themselves. If lions and tigers in the same area lived on precisely the same prey they would compete, and when the prey became scarce, the more successful of the two might exterminate the less successful. But it is probable that these animals in their native jungles live on quite different prey, and are thus both able to subsist together. Natural selection would bring about this result. The competition here is therefore the same as elsewhere, viz., between individuals of the same species. It may result in the production of varieties and new species, but its main effect is to keep down the number of individuals of each species, so that there can never exist more than a certain number of lions, tigers, leopards, etc., in a given region.

v

It is obvious how completely different this all is from the bloody picture drawn by the well-meaning persons whose biological vagaries we are considering. But their errors in biology are scarcely less gross than their errors in ethnology. I had not

proposed to consider these here, but there is one that it may be well to point out as typical of them all. This is the much-discussed doctrine of "social pathology." This is one of the most specious and pernicious of all sociological fallacies. It consists in regarding all social phenomena that do not meet with the approval of these writers, as abnormal and as social diseases. The social phenomenon commonly called war is regarded as especially irregular and morbid, and comes in for the principal share of denunciation, which seems to be the form of medical treatment chiefly prescribed. But as the entire history of mankind has been characterized by incessant war, it follows that disease has been the prevailing condition and leading characteristic of human society. One might well wonder that mankind should have even survived, much more that the race should be able to present the robust appearance which it does present. If disease prevailed over health in any such degree among individuals surely we should have a moribund race of weaklings, even if they could exist at all.

It is therefore evident that the entire doctrine of social pathology must be fundamentally false, and that what is called war must be in a certain sense a normal condition. But a very little inspection shows that what is called war is simply the struggle of races for existence and for predominance, and is at least analogous to the biological struggle for existence, which no one would think of calling pathologic. Although, as I have shown, the principle involved in the race struggle is not the same as that involved in the organic struggle, still it has the same effect, and results in the survival of the fittest, which, as all know, are not always the ideally best. But in pure sociology we are not dealing with ideals any more than we are in biology. We are dealing with facts and searching for truth, and the fact is that the course of human development has been characterized and determined by the struggle of races, peoples, and nations, and whatever progress has been attained has grown out of this struggle, which is a perfectly normal and healthy condition, and, properly understood, does not possess the evil and immoral attributes that have been ascribed to it. It is ethically colorless, or, as they say, amoral

or anethical, and is simply the consequence of a universal, even cosmical law of nature.

Nor has this historical study anything to do with the question of the abolition of war in the present advanced stage of civilization, unless, indeed, here as everywhere, an understanding of the past places us in a better condition for stating and solving that question. To accuse, as these writers do, the historical and scientific sociologists who have discovered and expounded the law and process of social development, of being for this reason apologists of war among modern nations, is a cheap rhetorical flourish, unworthy of anyone who aspires to be accounted a philosopher.